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## GOVERNMENT REFORM

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## Congress of the United States

House of Representatives

Washington, DC 20515-4501

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2/27/03

APR 16 2003

Chairman Michael Powell  
Federal Communication Commission

Federal Communications Commission  
Office of the Secretary

### AN OPEN LETTER TO FCC CHAIRMAN MICHAEL POWELL REGARDING THE CONSOLIDATION OF OWNERSHIP OF AMERICAN MEDIA

Dear Chairman Powell,

Let's be clear. One of the great crises facing this country is that a handful of huge corporations control the flow of information. Whether it is television, radio, newspapers, magazines, books or the Internet, fewer and fewer giant conglomerates are determining what we see, hear and read. Unless we stop this trend and create a media with much broader ownership and diversity of opinion, it is not certain that democracy will survive in this country. This is a major, major concern that must be dealt with immediately. I fear very much that if we continue down the path we're on, we will end up like the former Soviet Union - a nation where there were many different news outlets, but all were controlled by the same entity. The difference is that in this country it will be multi-national corporations who control the media, and not the government.

Let me express my outrage that the FCC has chosen to have only one public hearing on what is one of the most important issues facing Americans today. Before any decisions are made regarding deregulation and increased corporate control over the media, the FCC must hear from the American people. In my view, the FCC should hold at least twenty meetings across the country to hear directly what ordinary the people have to say. Having held two town meetings in the state of Vermont on the issue of media consolidation, I can tell you first hand that the people of this country want to be heard on this issue. In Vermont, at the two public meetings that we held, over 600 people came out. I guarantee that you will have huge audiences all over the country and, let me take this opportunity to invite you to Vermont. Please do not make a decision without input from the people. Given what goes on in Washington it may be hard to believe, but there are opinions in this country which do not necessarily agree with Rupert Murdoch, General Electric, the Disney Corporation and other large campaign contributors.

Why do we want more de-regulation and more concentration of ownership in the media? We should be moving in the other direction - less concentration, more diverse ownership and more points of view. Television is the means by which most Americans get their "news." Without exception, every major network is owned by a huge conglomerate that has enormous conflicts of interest. Fox News Channel is owned by

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Rupert Murdoch, a right-wing billionaire who already owns a significant portion of the world's media. His network has close ties to the Republican Party, and among his "fair and balanced" commentators is Newt Gingrich.

NBC is owned by General Electric, one of the largest corporations in the world and a company with enormous conflicts of interest. GE has a long history of anti-union activity. It has substantial interests in weapons manufacturing, finance, nuclear power and many other industries. It has vital concerns about our trade policy as they have been one of the leaders in shutting down American plants and moving them to low-wage countries like China and Mexico. GE is also an important contributor to the Republican Party.

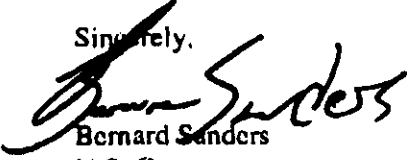
ABC is owned by the Disney Corp., which produces toys and products in developing countries where they provide their workers atrocious wages and working conditions. CBS is owned by Viacom, another huge media conglomerate that owns, among other entities, MTV, Showtime, Nickelodeon, VH1, TNN, CMT, 39 broadcast television stations, 184 radio stations, Paramount Pictures and Blockbuster Inc.

The essential problem with television is not just a right-wing corporate bias in news and programming, or the transformation of politics and government into entertainment and sensationalism. Nor is it just the constant bombardment of advertising, much of it directed at children. It's that the most important issues facing the middle-class and working people of our country are rarely discussed. The average American watches dozens of hours a week of television, but to a very significant degree does not see his or her reality reflected on the screen.

In my strong opinion what the people of this country see, hear and read should not be controlled by a handful of multi-national conglomerates. More concentration of ownership in the media industry would be a disaster for this country. Stop the deregulation, and begin hearings on how we can have more diverse ownership and more divergent viewpoints on the public airwaves. Democracy is too precious to be given over to corporations interested only in growing bigger and more profitable. The airwaves and cable-ways belong to the people, and the interests of the people should be served.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,



Bernard Sanders  
U.S. Congressman